



Disability Awareness Month



Judy Heumann (1947-)

Assistant Secretary

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

As Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) since June 1993, Judith E. Heumann and her 350-person staff manage the Office of Special Education Programs, the Rehabilitation Services Administration, and the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, which have a combined budget of over \$5.5 billion. Together, these units coordinate and fund programs that impact America's 49 million disabled citizens and directly serve almost 6 million disabled children, youth and adults in virtually every community in America.

Heumann was among those who pioneered modern legislation recognizing that the U.S. Constitution guarantees equality of access and opportunity to persons with disabilities. As legislative assistant to the chairperson of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare in 1974, she helped develop legislation that became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

In subsequent years, she helped draft the Americans with Disabilities Act, helped develop regulations for Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and helped design federal and state legislation that led to the creation of more than 200 independent living centers nationwide.

Heumann's deep commitment to the goal of building an inclusive society comes from her own experiences. Since having polio at the age of 18 months, Heumann has known discrimination firsthand. She was denied the right to attend a public school until the fourth grade. She was able to begin her career as a teacher in the New York City school system only after she sued the Board of Education, which had refused to give her a teaching position because she uses a wheel chair.

Since being appointed assistant secretary of education, Heumann has revitalized and initiated nationwide programs to help people with disabilities obtain the knowledge and skills they need to make their individual contributions to society, a goal which is an important part of President Clinton's agenda. Heumann has been working with citizens' groups across the nation -- and with virtually every branch of government -- to make sure that policies and programs designed to meet the goals of education reform and full employment address issues involving disabled people.

Heumann has been also successfully working to make OSERS' programs more accessible to disabled individuals from minority and culturally diverse backgrounds. She is committed to program accountability and to building public awareness of model programs that work.